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UNCLAS HALIFAX 000263

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HALIFAX TOPS IN VIOLENT CRIME RATE

1. Halifax is the violent crime capital of Canada (based on rate of crime per 1,000 population), according to the Canadian Centre of Justice Statistics recently released General Social Survey (GSS) on criminal victimization in Canada. The survey is conducted every five years. The latest survey, done between January and December 2004, involved roughly 24,000 randomly selected Canadians. They were asked if, within the previous 12 months, they had been the victim of one of the eight following offenses: sexual assault, robbery, physical assault, theft of personal property, breaking and entering, motor vehicle/parts theft, theft of household property and vandalism. The survey seeks to capture a truer picture of the actual crime levels, in that it considers both crimes that were reported to the police and those that were not.

2. The eight offenses are broken down into two categories: violent victimization (sexual assault, robbery, and physical assault) and household victimization (the five other property crimes). Nationwide the Canadian violent victimization rate was 106 per 1,000 population aged 15 years and over. At the provincial level, Nova Scotia's rate of 157 fell just short of the 160 in Alberta. Amongst metropolitan areas, Halifax's rate of 229 (71,000 violent incidents) was the highest. While there were more incidents in Toronto, its rate per 1,000 was 107. In terms of property crimes ("household victimization"), the highest rates were all in the West. Nova Scotia's rate of 232 per 1,000 was below the Canadian average of 248 per 1,000.

3. Both the Mayor and police chief pointed to repeat young offenders as the principal source of crime. The Mayor, noting that 32 new police have been hired in the last two years, said he would seek a meeting with federal and provincial justice ministers to try to toughen up youth offender legislation. The police chief likewise called for a change in the youth justice system, "They've committed as many as 40 new offenses while they're on interim release from the courts, and it becomes like fishing. You catch and release and you catch again and release."

4. COMMENT: Despite the dubious prize in this contest, Halifax remains a safe place to live and work. Hundreds of thousands of American visitors annually have very few problems. The city is also a popular liberty port for USN and USCG vessels and we have had no reports of crime against U.S. personnel in years. END COMMENT.

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